

Golden Globes return after Hollywood boycott

The Golden Globes—long known as Hollywood's favorite party, but rocked by recent scandals—will attempt to stage a celebrity-filled comeback Tuesday, as films from Steven Spielberg's "The Fabelmans" to "Top Gun" and "Avatar" sequels compete for top honors.

The Globes traditionally play a key role in kick-starting the movie awards season, but were taken off air last year amid controversy over ethical lapses and a lack of diversity in the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, which organizes the Beverly Hills gala.

This year, following efforts to reform the HFPA—which previously had no Black members—NBC will broadcast the 80th Golden Globe Awards on a one-off basis, and invitations have been dispatched to Tinseltown's brightest stars.

A-listers expected in the ballroom at the Beverly Hilton include Spielberg, whose semi-autobiographical film is the favorite to win best drama, and Eddie Murphy, who will receive a career achievement award. Comedian Jerrod Carmichael will host the ceremony, and Quentin Tarantino is among the night's presenters.

But many top nominees have not yet confirmed their attendance, and Deadline awards columnist Pete Hammond expects this year's Globes to be "different" from the glitzy, hard-partying, champagne-soaked bashes seen before COVID and industry boycotts interrupted the merrymaking.

"They are going to be muted. There's no after-parties to go to. There's none of that. They're not spending big bucks, the studios, on all of this," Hammond told AFP. Those who walk the red carpet will be peppered with questions from journalists like "Do you feel comfortable being here?" and "Are you satisfied they've made all the changes?" he predicted. "It's not going to be exclusively 'What are you wearing?'"

Spielberg, Cruise, Cameron

Unlike the Oscars, the Golden Globes movie



US director Steven Spielberg attends the 40th Anniversary Screening of "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial" presented on the Opening Night of the 2022 TCM Classic Film Festival at the TCL Chinese Theater in Hollywood. The Golden Globes — long known as Hollywood's favorite party, but rocked by recent scandals — will attempt to stage a celebrity-filled comeback Tuesday. —AFP

awards are split between "drama" and "comedy or musical" categories. On the drama side, "The Fabelmans" is up against last year's two biggest box office hits—the blockbuster sequel "Top Gun: Maverick" starring Tom Cruise, and James Cameron's "Avatar: The Way of Water."

"Tar," set in the cutthroat world of classical music,

and rock-and-roll biopic "Elvis" could also spring surprises. Their respective stars—Cate Blanchett, who plays a ruthless conductor, and Austin Butler, stepping into Presley's blue suede shoes—are frontrunners for drama acting prizes.

But "The Whale" nominee Brendan Fraser, who alleges he was once sexually assaulted by a former

HFPA president, has ruled out attending Tuesday's gala. Cruise, a producer on "Top Gun: Maverick," is also unlikely to attend, after he returned his three Globes to the HFPA in 2021 in protest at its behavior. "The Banshees of Inisherin" holds the most overall nominations at this year's Globes, with eight, and is a favorite to win best comedy, as well as best comedy actor for Colin Farrell.

The movie about a shattered friendship on a remote Irish island will contend with surreal, multi-verse-hopping sci-fi film "Everything Everywhere All At Once," which is seeking acting prizes for Michelle Yeoh, Jamie Lee Curtis and Ke Huy Quan.

'Scandal'

In years past, success at the Globes was a potential bellwether for films hoping to win Oscars, and served as a valuable marketing tool. Indeed, Academy voters will begin casting ballots for Oscar nominations on Thursday, just days after the Globes gala.

But recent controversies have muddied the waters. The addition of more than 100 new, more racially diverse Globes voters, who are not full HFPA members, has made it even harder to predict who the enigmatic group of foreign journalists will reward.

While movie billboards and commercials boasting of Globes nominations have returned after last year's notable absence, few nominees have publicly thanked the HFPA. According to Hammond, some in the industry privately yearn for the old Globes to return because the show is an important "cog in the wheel of awards season" which has "been around Hollywood for 80 years."

"You can't buy tradition," he said. But rows over diversity, alleged corruption and lack of professionalism have "lessened" the Globes' sheen when it comes to influencing the Oscars, Hammond said. "When every (Globes) story talks about the scandal... it doesn't make it as credible, I think, to the Oscar voters," he said. —AFP



Palestinian theatre director Mustafa Sheta, general manager of the "Freedom Theatre" at the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank, stands before a mural showing the faces of prominent Palestinian figures (R to L) Nizar Banat (late activist), Mahmoud Darwish (author and poet), Naji al-Ali (cartoonist) and others during a tour of the premises. —AFP photos



People stand outside the "Freedom Theatre" at the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank.

Show goes on at Palestinian theatres overcoming obstacles

Past the sandbags and anti-tank obstacles in Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, theatre director Mustafa Sheta ponders the fate of Palestinian thespians. "We are under a very abnormal situation," Sheta told AFP at the camp's Freedom Theatre.

The streets were silent that December day as residents had called a public strike to protest Zionist forces killing a 16-year-old Palestinian girl in Jenin hours earlier. With Zionist forces raiding Jenin repeatedly in recent months, engaging in gunfights with Palestinian militants, the Freedom Theatre's ability to provide residents with respite is under growing strain.

In 2011, the theatre's well-known Zionist-Palestinian director Juliano Mer-Khamis was gunned down in Jenin's refugee camp, in an attack that remains unsolved. Other Palestinian cultural institutions across the West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem or Zionist entity also face many obstacles.

"It's not like you have a clear plan in your schedule... you need to prepare for different scenarios," said Sheta, 42. Ahead of the opening night of the theatre's latest production, "Metro Gaza", the creatives woke up to find three Palestinians had been killed in an Zionist operation.

"What can we do? Can we continue, or stop, cancel the show?" asked Sheta. The actors took to the stage as planned and an audience of around 75 filled half the stalls. Yasmin Shalalkeh, 30, a Jerusalemite who plays a Gazan girl in the show, said it was

"essential to keep on working", particularly in Jenin.

More than 40 Palestinians were killed last year during Zionist operations in the Jenin area, including militants, children, and a teenager involved in the theatre's youth programme who was shot dead in November.

Funding ban After Jenin, "Metro Gaza" went on tour to Ramallah, east Jerusalem and finally Haifa in northern Zionist entity. Each playhouse faces its own challenges and Jerusalem's El-Hakawati, also known as the Palestinian National Theatre, has seen its audiences dwindle since Israel began constructing a barrier around the West Bank in the early 2000s.

"After the wall and the checkpoints, (it) started to get less and less, people cannot come," said director Amer Khalil, as the sound of children enjoying a puppet show drifted into the room. Whether living in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Zionist entity or the blockaded Gaza Strip, Palestinians hold different papers which impact the ability of theatre casts and audiences to travel.

"It's torture," said Shalalkeh. "When you have a play in Jerusalem and you send it to someone from Gaza and they want to come, they can't." Long gone are the days when directors must submit their script to Zionist censors, yet the theatre is "threatened by other things," said Khalil. Decorated with posters of past productions, El-Hakawati's foyer bustles with Jerusalemites ahead of each new performance.

But the director described a "very, very, very difficult-critical-economic situation", with ticket sales

not even covering a third of running costs. El-Hakawati cannot receive any support from the Palestinian Authority, which is banned by Israel from operating in Jerusalem, leaving it to "live on donations" largely from European states, said Khalil.

"Like the whole world, you have a national theatre and... the running costs—electricity, water, taxes—are all paid by the government or by the municipality. And this is what we don't have here," he said.

'Delivering art to people'

For Al Saraya, a theatre in the coastal city of Jaffa that receives state funding from Zionist entity, such support is far from unconditional. Mahmoud Abu Arisheh, its 34-year-old director, said the theatre's mission is to celebrate "the richness and uniqueness of the Arab culture".

In November, then finance minister Avigdor Lieberman called on authorities to take "all the available measures, including denying funding" when Al Saraya screened "Farha", a film depicting alleged Zionist atrocities against Palestinians.

Abu Arisheh said threats and incitements against the theatre "are already limiting our freedom of speech and expression." And sanctions by Zionist authorities "could happen at any time", the director warns. But Palestinian artists, whether in Jaffa, Jenin or Jerusalem, must keep the show going, said actor Shalalkeh. "Even with all of this situation... and the cruelty in the world, it is important to keep on living and delivering art to people." —AFP

Record-breaking winter temperatures warm Europe

Europe has seen "extreme" warm winter weather in recent days, experts have said, with 2023 already posting record temperatures for January across the region.

As temperatures rise globally because of human-caused climate change, scientists say heatwaves and spells of warmer-than-average weather are becoming more common throughout the year.

After experiencing searing summer heat and a drought unprecedented in centuries, a wave of warm weather across Europe this winter has melted the snow from ski slopes in the Alps and Pyrenees, and seen temperatures above 20 degrees Celsius (68 degrees Fahrenheit) even in normally-freezing central regions.

Several European countries saw record-breaking heat on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, according to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).

Hundreds of weather stations across Europe have recorded all-time highest daily temperatures for the months of December or January, it said this week.

Freja Vamborg, Senior Scientist at Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), said the current winter heatwave is an "extreme" heat event in Europe in terms of how far temperatures have deviated from what is expected at this time of year. Here Vamborg answers some key questions about the heatwave:

What caused these high temperatures?

"On the 1st of January there was strong flow of air from the southwest across the affected area, which would have brought warmer air further north and penetrated unusually far east, reaching even to Belarus. Minimal snow cover was very probably another relevant factor."

"The circulation of any given weather situation and climate change are not two independent things. Climate change itself also has an impact on the circulation, and will also impact how warm those moving air masses are. This is what makes it so complex to disentangle just simply a weather event, from the level to which climate change influenced such an event."

How is climate change involved?

"With increasing global temperatures, heatwaves and warm spells are becoming more frequent and intense — this is not restricted to the summer months."

"While the warming trend in Europe is on average stronger in the warmer seasons, winters are also becoming warmer as a result of global temperatures."

"Northern Europe has warmed more strongly in winter than in summer, while in the south the warming trend is more apparent in summer."

What is the impact of these high winter temperatures?

"A couple of things can be mentioned for warm temperatures during the winter months. While it means less need for heating of housing and other infrastructures, low snow cover affects the winter tourism industry."

"Possible impacts on natural ecosystems, include early return from hibernation, which may have negative impacts if followed by much less mild/freezing conditions." "The overall impact will be different depending on the longevity and intensity of the event." —AFP

Widely decried, in Colombia 'blackface' celebrates diversity

The practice of blackface is denounced as racist in the United States and many other countries. In Colombia, it is a key element of a festival to celebrate diversity. The Carnaval de Negros y Blancos (Carnival of Blacks and Whites) gathers thousands of revelers from December 28 to January 6 each year in Pasto in southwest Colombia.

Billing itself as a celebration of equality, it has been held for more than a century in a region home to many Afro-Colombians and Indigenous communities heavily marked by racial and economic inequality. "Welcome to the only party where painting one's face is World Heritage!" the festival website proclaims.

The carnival, one of Colombia's biggest, is inscribed on UNESCO's "Representative List of the

Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity." Every year, celebrations kick off with giant water battles followed by bonfires on December 31, the burning of wooden or straw puppets, and a costume parade.

'Human brotherhood'

"The main days of the carnival are the last two, when people of all ethnicities don black cosmetics on the first day, then white talcum on the next to symbolize equality and integrate all citizens through a celebration of ethnic and cultural difference," according to UNESCO. "The festival is especially important as the expression of a mutual desire for a future of tolerance and respect," states its website.

Unlike in the United States or elsewhere, the

carnival's practice of blackface elicits no controversy. Quite the contrary. Toby Boecker, from Germany and in blackface, said he had asked around whether the practice was controversial so as not to fall foul of local mores. "I was told: 'No, it's part of the local culture.'"

The carnival is a relic of slave festivals of the 17th and 18th centuries, allowed by Spanish colonists in a bid to stave off revolt. "The Carnival of Blacks and Whites celebrates human brotherhood. We are one people," said Milton Portilla, culture director for the Narino department of which Pasto is the capital. For Leonardo Sanson Guerrero, a former organizer of the event, it is an important "expression of a cultural identity." —AFP